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ABSTRACT

Distance education is offered by 4 universities and 34 institutes/directorates in India. All open universities have been brought under the direction of the Indira Gandhi National Open University with regard to networking and determination of grants. The networking has avoided unnecessary duplication of course preparation costs. Distance education is also offered by Correspondence Directorate/Institutes, which account for 90 percent of total enrollment. The open universities have much greater freedom to innovate courses and experiment with flexible designs. Directorates are attached to the formal university system and provide the advantage of transferability. They have not been as richly endowed by the state and should be granted both fiscal and academic autonomy. Enrollment in distance education is concentrated in certain regions of the country and in 10 of the 34 directorates. Because the demand for higher education is so great, the supply constraint determines the rate of growth of distance education. Distance education must be prepared to meet the continuing demand for conventional courses and offer certificate and diploma courses. There is a great need to develop infrastructures in the form of learning resource centers. Video production centers and high quality reading materials are also needed. (Six appendixes provide enrollment data.) (YLB)

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DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIA PRESENT AND FUTURE*

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After about 27 years of growth, Distance Education in India is being imparted by four universities and 34 institutes/directorates. Among the four universities, the Andhra Pradesh Open University (1982), the Indira Gandhi National Open University (1985) and Kota Open University (1987) have been able to make good beginning during the short span of 5-6 years. However, Nalanda Open University (Bihar) though formally established is yet to make a beginning in starting some courses. All the Open Universities, as per the latest decision of the Government of India, will form a network with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). They shall also receive grants from IGNOU. In other words, the Open University System has been brought under the IGNOU umbrella both from the point of view of net working as also determination of grants. Courses which have been designed by IGNOU need not be got written again by other Open Universities. The reading material of IGNOU can be used by other Open Universities. A general guideline has been formulated. Nearly 60 to 70 per cent of the IGNOU syllabus shall have to be taken by an Open University adopting an IGNOU course, the open universities shall have the freedom to alter it to the extent of 30 to 40 per cent depending upon the needs of the region. The networking has, therefore, avoided unnecessary duplication, nay multiplication of expenditure on preparing courses, only to keep the identity of the University. This is a welcome development.

As against the Open University System which as yet is in its infant stage of development, distance education is imparted by Correspondence Directorate/Institutes attached with the formal university system. In 1987-88, as against 10 per cent students being serviced by the Open Universities, the Distance Education Directorates accounted for 90 per cent of the total enrolment. However, these proportions are likely to undergo a change over time as the Open University Network matures. The two systems are to co-exist with advantages and limitations of both of them. The Open University System has much greater freedom to innovate courses, experiment with flexible designs and evolve its own system of evaluation. The biggest advantage of the system is its exclusive devotion to the development of distance education. As against it, the Distance Education directorates attached with conventional universities use the same syllabi and carry with them the stamp of the well-established conventional universities and thus are more acceptable to the public. A student from these directorates can switch over without much difficulty to conventional system and vice-versa. The pattern of the syllabi of the Open University System does not provide the student this advantage of transferability. As a consequence, the Distance Education Directorates with conventional system will continue to attract students.

There is a growing feeling and rightly so, that whereas the Open Universities are richly endowed by the State, the Distance Education directorates are either very poorly funded by the

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state or are called upon to fend for themselves as self-supporting institutions. In some cases, these directorates are forced to generate surplus from student fees and provide funds for the expansion and development of conventional universities. It is, therefore, vitally important that DE directorates should be provided autonomy within the university system so as to plan new courses, to experiment with different job-oriented syllabi and even to try a new pattern of examination. No part of the funds raised from student fees of Distance Education students should be used to finance the conventional system. The directive of the UGC in this regard which has so far been ignored by the Universities with impunity, should be enforced. In case, the Universities do not acquiesce, their grants should be correspondingly curtailed.

For providing autonomy to the directorates, they should be granted the status of independent departments or alternatively autonomous institutes within the University structure. Another model that can be experimented is to have Open University Campuses within the University structure. Universities depending upon the unique nature of their circumstances can choose any one of these models, but they must ensure autonomy, both academic and fiscal, to distance education directorates. Such a step will enable them to improve the quality of distance education and thus help the system to face the challenge of developing a viable, good and efficient DE System.

Since as a part of the National Education Policy, the State intends to keep enrolment in formal education restricted, it has stopped encouraging the starting of more and more colleges and universities. As a consequence during 1980-81 to 1987-88, total enrolment in the conventional system grew from 27.5 lakhs to 38.14 lakhs giving a growth rate of barely 4.78 per cent. As against it, during 1980-81 to 1987-88, enrolment in Distance Education improved from 1.66 lakhs to 4.02 lakhs giving a growth rate of 13.46 per cent. Obviously, distance education is expanding nearly three-times faster than the formal university education. If this trend is continued, it is hoped by the year 2000 AD, the number of students in distance education will be around 20.8 lakhs as against 65.9 lakhs in Universities and colleges. In other words, whereas in total enrolment in higher education, in 1987-88, the share of distance education was about 10.6 per cent, it is likely to go up to 24 per cent by the year 2000 (Refer appendix I & II).

Existing Situation in Distance Education

This scenario calls for an examination of the existing spread of enrolment so that new strategies to cope up with the rising demand for distance education be evolved. A study of the regionwise spread of enrolment reveals that during 1987-88, out of a total enrolment of 4.02 lakhs in Distance Education, the Southern region (comprising Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) accounted for 2.88 lakhs or about 72 per cent of total enrolment. Tamil Nadu alone accounted for 1.89 lakh enrolment, nearly 47 per cent of total enrolment in the country. Next in importance is the Northern Region (comprising Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) had a total enrolment 82,411 in 1987-88 or 20.5 per cent of total enrolment. Taking these two regions together, 92 per cent of the total enrolment in distance Education is concentrated in them. The Central and Western Region had an enrolment of about 24,000 i.e., nearly 6 per cent of total. The Eastern Region comprising Assam, Bihar, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa and West Bengal accounted for about 8,300 students—2.1 per cent of total (Refer Appendix III). All this indicates that in this vast country, distance education has yet to be seriously tried in quite a good number of states with very large populations. Among them are Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Gujarat and Assam.

Secondly, there is a high degree of concentration in Distance Education. A study of enrolment trends reveals that out of 34 directorates, 10 directorates with an enrolment above

10,000 account for 83 per cent of the total enrolment in the country in 1987-88. It is highly disappointing to note that on the one hand, we have the Institute of Correspondence courses, Madras, with an enrolment of about 93,000 students in 1987-88, on the other hand, there are twelve directorates with an enrolment of less than 2,000 and 8 directorates with an enrolment ranging between 2,000 to 5,000. Thus out of 34 directorates, 20 can be considered as non-viable with an enrolment level below 5,000 (Refer Appendix IV). Efforts should be made to devise ways and means to make these non-viable directorates viable so that the tremendous demand for higher education can be met by them. A few attempts made by Utkal University, Bhubneshwar, and Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, have helped them to become viable in 1988-89. Such attempts are welcome and need to be encouraged further.

Lastly, there is a diversification in distance education that is taking place. Although during the seventies, only post-graduate courses were taken up along with under-graduate conventional courses, the situation is changing and in the year 1987-88, about 16 per cent of the total enrolment was in professional degrees and diploma courses. This is a healthy trend and needs to be encouraged (Appendix VI).

Future of Distance Education

The question arises: What is the future of distance education in the country ? It may be stated without any fear of contradiction that the demand for higher education is so high that the formal system as well as the distance education system taken together cannot meet. Thus, it is the supply constraint which determines the rate of growth of distance education. It is, therefore, imperative that distance education institutions whether in the form of more state Open Universities or Directorates attached with conventional universities be started, more especially in those states, which are arid regions so far as distance education is concerned.

The second relevant question is about the choice of courses to be taken up. There is no doubt that demand for over-education is a reflex of the prevailing unemployment situation in our country. To stand ahead in the queue, the unemployed try to acquire higher degrees. This explains partly the mad rush for B.A., B.Com., B. Sc., M.A. and M.Com. courses. So there shall be a continuing demand for conventional courses which DE instituions have to cater.

Besides this, there are a good number of job-oriented and professional courses which promise better careers for the young. There are courses which upgrade the skills of the people thereby enabling them to earn better pay scales. The mad rush for B.Ed. courses is a case in point. The B.Ed. courses promise better pay scales for untrained teachers and post-graduate courses enable them to become eligible for post-graduate trained teacher scales. Courses in Business Management are another high demand area. wherever such courses have been taken up, there has been no dearth of students. But quite recently, distance educatuion directorates have started a very large number of certificates and diploma courses. Notable among them are: Diploma in Journalism, Tourism and Hotel Management, Public Accounting, Public Administration, Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Financial Management, Office Organisation and procedures, International Marketing, Marketing Management, Project Management, Production Management, Labour Law and Labour welfare, Management of public Enterprises, Banking, Distance Education, Library and Information Science, Automobile Technology, Child health and Family Welfare, Teaching of English, Certificate courses in Hindi, Urdu, English Improvement, Kannada. This list is not fully exhaustive.

Still there is a scope for undertaking science courses. Some universities such as Annamalia, Andra Pradesh (Waltair), A.P. Open University, Madras, Madurai and Osmania have experimented with B.Sc. and M.Sc. courses. They are also experimenting with some engineering

courses. All these experiments are welcome because they help the weaker sections of our society to get training in areas which had been closed for them by the formal system.

Let me pose another question pertaining to the quality of distance education. The critics of distance education charge this system as a kind of substandard system of education. They even allege that reading materials prepared by many directorates are comparable to cheap notes. But for reading materials, no worthwhile student support services have been developed. These criticisms have an element of truth in them, but are largely biased impressionistic statements. But state policies are largely responsible for this state of affairs. It is one thing to say in the National Policy Statement that the State intends to encourage distance education as an alternative and relatively less expensive system, but when it comes to making a provision in plan allocation for this system, the state withdraws its hand. The UGC budget has never allocated even one per cent of its funds for distance education. The Seventh Plan did not make any specific provision for the development of distance education. Now that by the end of the Eighth Plan, nearly 15-17 per cent students will be receiving instruction through distance education system, does it not seem reasonable that at least 10 per cent of total plan funds for higher education are specifically allocated for distance education.

There is a great need to develop infrastructures in the form of Learning Resource Centres throughout the country. Besides, the reading materials, support services in the form of personal contact programmes, personal guidance to students, use of audio and video cassettes and library services are needed so that the distance learner can acquire deeper understanding of the subject. For this purpose, the UGC should establish 100 Learning Resource Centres throughout the length and breadth of the country. The average cost of a composite learning resource centre would be in the range of Rs. 50 lakhs. If in the first instance, at the 34 headquarters of Distance Education directorates, these centres are created and later they are spread to 100 district headquarters, then by the end of the Eighth Plan, the country can have a network of Learning Resource Centres. Students belonging to any Open University or Distance Education Institution/Directorate should be permitted to become members of the Learning Resource Centres. Such a network of facitlities can help to enrich distance education.

Similarly, infrastructure in the form of video-production centres shall have to be established at atleast 10 major Distance Education directorates which account for 83 per cent of total enrolment. This requires provision of funds to acquire equipment as well as to create teams of experts to work with academics to produce video-cassettes directly related to the courses of study.

Reading materials are to continue still as the most important component of distance education system. There is a need for a closer review of the reading materials produced by different directorates. Subject experts drawn from different universities should be associated with the preparation of reading materials. The payment for writing reading materials should be modelled on the pattern of Indira Gandhi National Open University. Editing and vetting of these materials written by subject experts to make them self-learning materials should be undertaken. All these efforts at qualitative improvement require two things: to associate experts with the preparation of reading materials and to consider expenditure on the preparation of reading materials as a kind of investment.

To sum up, with the expanding demand for higher education the absorptive capacity of the distance education institutions will have to be increased so that by the year 2,000 they can absorb 20 lakh students. This requires strengthening and enlarging the network of Open Universities and Distance Education Directorates. The UGC, the Indira Gandhi National Open

University and the representatives of the Directorates of Distance Education should pool their resources to meet the rapidly growing demand for Distance Education. State support has been sadly lacking. It is time that both the UGC and the Planning Commission should provide at least 10 per cent of both plan and non-plan budget for providing financial support to distance education institutions in the Eighth Plan to be raised to 15 per cent in the Ninth Plan so that the Distance Education System which is relatively less costly can become a more effective system of learning.

Appendix I

Total Enrolment in Higher Education in India

	University Departments & Colleges	Distance Education (Universities & Institutions	Total Enrolment
	(1)	(2)	(3=1+2)
1975-76	24,26,109	64,210	24,90,319
	(97.4)	(2.6)	(100.0)
1976-77	24,31,563	79,718	25,11,281
	(96.8)	(3.2)	(100.0)
1977-78	25,64,972	1,19,163	26,84,135
	(95.6)	(5.5)	(100.0)
1978-79	26,18,228	1,33,459	27,51,687
	(95.1)	(4.9)	(100.0)
1979-80	26,48,579	1,36,699	27,85,278
	(95.1)	(4.9)	(100.0)
1980-81	27,52,437	1,66,428	29,18,865
	(94.3)	(5.7)	(100.0)
1981-82	29,52,066	1,93,691	31,45,757
	(93.8)	(6.2)	(100.0)
1982-83	31,33,093	1,97,555	33,30,648
	(94.1)	(5.9)	(100.0)
1983-84	33,07,649	n.a.	....
1984-85	34,04,096	n.a.	....
1985-86	35,70,897	3,55,090	39,25,987
	(91.0)	(9.0)	(100.0)
1986-87	36,81,870	3,57,791	40,39,661
	(91.1)	(8.9)	(100.0)
1987-88	38,14,417	4,02,720	42,17,137
	(89.4)	(10.6)	(100.0)

Appendix II

Projected Yearly increase in Enrolment in Distance Education in India on the base of Yearly Growth Rate 13.46 (1980-81 to 1987-88) average rate of growth

1987-88	4,02,720	
1988-89	4,56,926	54,206
1989-90	5,18,428	61,502
1990-91	5,88,209	69,781
1991-92	6,67,382	79,173
1992-93	7,57,211	89,829
1993-94	8,59,132	1,01,921
1994-95	9,74,771	1,15,639
1995-96	11,05,975	1,31,204
1996-97	12,54,840	1,48,865
1997-98	14,23,741	1,68,901
1988-99	16,15,377	1,91,636
1999-2000	18,32,806	2,17,429
2000-2001	20,79,502	2,46,696

Appendix V

Frequency Distribution of Distance Education Institutions on the basis of Enrolment Sizes in India

Enrolment size	1980-81	1982-83	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
0 -2,000	10	12	16	16	12
2,000 - 5,000	3	1	6	5	8
5,000 - 10,000	6	6	3	5	4
10,000 - 20,000	3	3	3	2	4
20,000 & above	1	2	6	6	6
Total :	23	24	34	34	34

Appendix III

Enrolment in Distance Education in India Regionwise

Year	Southern Region	Northern Region	Central & Western Region	Eastern Region	Total
1975-76	23,824	37,358	1,432	1,596	64,210
	(37.1)	(58.2)	(2.2)	(2.50)	(100.0)
1976-77	25,818	42,695	9,536	1,669	79,718
	(32.4)	(53.6)	(12.0)	(2.0)	(100.0)
1977-78	59,457	48,368	8,456	2,882	1,19,163
	(49.9)	(40.6)	(7.1)	(2.4)	(100.0)
1978-79	71,323	46,187	13,941	2,008	1,33,459
	(53.5)	(34.6)	(10.4)	(1.5)	(100.0)
1979-80	83,307	42,844	9,072	1,476	1,36,699
	(60.9)	(31.4)	(6.6)	(1.1)	(100.0)
1980-81	1,10,038	41,724	12,809	1,857	1,66,428
	(66.1)	(25.1)	(7.7)	(1.1)	(100.0)
1981-82	1,35,922	42,250	12,765	2,754	1,93,691
	(70.2)	(21.8)	(6.6)	(1.4)	(100.0)
1982-83	1,38,294	42,283	14,615	2,363	1,97,555
	(70.0)	(21.4)	(7.4)	(1.2)	(100.0)
1983-84	...	...	...	...	...
1984-85	...	...	...	...	...
1985-86	2,65,317	66,146	21,035	2,592	3,55,690
	(74.7)	(18.6)	(5.9)	(0.7)	(100.0)
1986-87	2,65,505	66,378	22,093	3,814	3,57,791
	(74.2)	(18.6)	(6.2)	(1.1)	(100.0)
1987-88	2,88,044	82,411	23,947	8,318	4,02,720
	(71.5)	(20.5)	(5.9)	(2.1)	(100.0)

Appendix IV

Total Enrolment in 10 Major Institutes of Distance Education with an enrolment of more than 10,000 in 1987-88

	1980-81	*1982-83*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*Rank*
1. I.C.C. Madras	——	9,615	67,968	78,123	92,737	1
2. I.C.C. Madurai—Kamraj	67,818	69,036	75,866	67,143	52,894	2
3. D.D.E. Annamalai	14,008	25,397	39,311	41,554	43,398	3
4. S.S.C. Delhi	6,482	9,822	21,466	22,743	27,478	6
5. D.C.C. Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.	11,042	11,701	7,181	7,181	12,928	9
6. D.C.C. Jaipur	6,988	6,136	13,000	12,068	13,910*	8
7. D.E. Bombay	5,280	6,603	12,283	11,807	11,234	10
8. D.C.C. Mysore	15,036	14,736	13,576	7,572	14,239	7
9. A.P. Open University	——	——	27,629	28,745	36,448	4
10. D.C.C. Andhra Waltair	9,105	14,469	29,829	29,258	28,528	5
Total for 9/10 Institutions	1,22,234 (73.4)	1,67,515 (84.8)	3,08,109 (86.8)	3,06,194 (82.6)	3,33,794 (82.9)	
Total for all D.E. Institutions	1,66,428 (100.0)	1,97,555 (100.0)	3,55,090 (100.0)	3,70,496 (100.0)	4,02,720 (100.0)	

*After 1987-88, D.C.C. Jaipur has been merged with Kota Open University

Appendix VI

Distribution of Correspondence Courses students studying in various Universities of India (1987-88)

	Enrolment	Percentage
I. Under-graduate Courses		
1. Pre-University/Foundation/I.A./I.Com.	26,634	
2. B.A. (Pass)	1,54,638	
3. B. Com. (Pass)	55,039	
4. B. Com. (Hons)	1,242	
5. B.Sc.	10,085	
Sub-total (i)	2,47,638	61.3
II. Post-graduate Courses		
1. M.A.	60,542	
2. M.Com.	28,254	
3. M.Sc.	5,036	
Sub-total (ii)	93,832	23.2
III. Profossional Degree Courses		
1. B.Ed.	22,852	
2. M.Ed.	11,492	
3. LLB/BGL	2,975	
4. B. Litt.	1,408	
5. Bachelor in Library Science	809	
6. B. Tech.	460	
7. M.B.A.	134	
8. M.phil	105	
Sub-total (iii)	40,235	
IV. Professional Diploma Courses	**Enrolment**	
Banking, Diploma in	21	
Co-operation & Rural Studies, P.G. Diploma in	60	
Distance Education, Diploma in	1,098	
Financial Management, Diploma in	381	
Geography, Diploma in	62	

Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, P.G. Diploma in	1,916	
International Marketing, Diploma in	20	
Job-oriented, Diploma Courses	1,386	
Journalism, Diploma in	421	
Journalism, P.G. Diploma in	260	
Kannada, P.G. Diploma in	150	
Labour Law and Labour Welfare and Personnel Management,	143	
Laws, Diploma in	766	
Library Science, Diploma in	505	
Linguistics, Junior Diploma in	14	
Linguistics, Senior Diploma in	17	
Management of Public Enterprises, Diploma in	197	
Management, Diploma in	7,072	
Marketing Management, Diploma in	114	
Material Management, Diploma in	177	
Mathematics, Diploma in	181	
Office Organisations and Procedures, Diploma in	132	
Operations Research for Management, Diploma in	82	
Production Management, Diploma in	65	
Project Management, Diploma in	36	
Public Accounting, P.G. Diploma in	2,413	
Public Administration, Diploma in	63	
Public Relations and Advertising, Diploma in	147	
Public Relations, P.G. Diploma in	723	
Teaching of English, P.G. Diploma in	562	
Tourism and Hotel Management	572	
Sub-total (iv)	19,756	(4.9)
V. Certificate Courses		
Library & Information Science	1,083	
Teaching of English, P.G. Certificate	699	
Automobile Technology	198	
Journalism and Mass Communication	485	
Child Health and Family Welfare	120	

Hindi/Urdu, Certificate Course	36	
English Improvement, Certificate Course	48	
Kannada, Certificate Course	131	
Panjabi, Praveshika	19	
Gyani	32	
Hindi & Pol. Sc., Special Course in	37	
Sub-total (v)	2,888	(0.7)
Grand Total (i to v)	4,04, 349	(100.0)